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Conservative group refocuses strategy

By Eric Gorski
Edited by Jim Borden
Headline by Andy Obermueller
The Gazette

Nearly a decade ago, Colorado for Family Values burst onto the national political scene when its controversial anti-gay rights measure, Amendment 2, won voter approval.

The Colorado Springs nonprofit group had a lot going for it: money, clout, grassroots support. The organization made such a splash that trade groups boycotted the state and opponents formed their own organizations to counter its influence.

Today, Colorado for Family Values is hardly a national power.

In the past year, the group moved its headquarters from leased office space to the home of a longtime staff member. The board of directors considered folding or merging with another conservative group but decided to make substantial budget cuts, refocus and press on.

What happened? A combination of factors: leadership turmoil, failed petition drives and spending that outpaced donations.

The group is still active, weighing in on a state Senate race in August and same-sex marriage and hate-crimes legislation. But it's no longer pitching ballot measures or aggressively trying to set the agenda on gay-rights issues.

While critics interpret that as a rejection of Colorado for Family Values' message, the group denies that and says the shift was financially and stra-

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ing promiscuous sex.

The 37-year-old country singer said getting married and having two children has settled him down.

"I could easily have killed myself, either with AIDS or with an accidental overdose," Tritt says in the Oct. 17 issue of Country Weekly. "I knew that if I kept doing drugs, somebody was going to find out. I didn't want to be an embarrassment to the people who helped me, so I decided I wasn't going to do that anymore."

Tritt's No. 1 hits include "Foolish Pride" and "Can I Trust You With My Heart."

CFV: Nonprofit spent more than it took in

From A1

tegically smart.

"We're a viable entity," said Colorado for Family Values operations manager Jim Witmer, the group's chief spokesman and only paid staffer. "We're still doing everything we were doing before. We did have a little bit of a down, but no longer."

Though its name suggests a broader mission, Colorado for Family Values has always had a narrow focus: fighting efforts to give homosexuals the same legal status as ethnic and racial minorities. The group also contests same-sex marriage initiatives.

The group successfully framed the Amendment 2 debate in 1992 as a way to prevent gays from gaining "special rights." The measure, which prohibited laws that would protect gays from discrimination based on sexual orientation, passed with 53.4 percent of the vote.

The fallout from the Amendment 2 vote polarized the state. Organizations such as Citizens Project sprang up to counter the message of Colorado for Family Values and other conservative groups based here.

Originally, the plan was to disband Colorado for Family Values after Amendment 2, said Martin Kuhn, a Monument attorney who used to be an officer of the group. But it stayed active while court challenges put Amendment 2 in legal limbo and continued to be active after the measure was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1996.

The group has dealt with turnover at the top. At times it had no director; in other cases, differences in philosophy led to resignations. The group has had no director for about a year and doesn't plan to fill the post.

The group also started to run low on funds.

Colorado for Family Values tax forms from 1996 to 1999 show that the group can raise substantial sums: $162,179 in 1996, $92,384 in 1997, $107,114 in 1998 and $90,687 in 1999.

The group is not required to disclose the names of its donors.

But Colorado for Family Values spent more than it raised in each of those years, according to its tax statements, which are public record and must be filed by most nonprofit groups.

The group spent its money on salaries, rent, advertising, postage and "special projects," among other things. It ran a $110,820 deficit between 1996 and 1999, the records show.

To stay in the black, Colorado for Family Values tapped its savings.

Those net assets, however, are dwindling: from $134,231 at the start of 1996 to $23,857 at the end of 1999, according to the tax forms.

Generally, a nonprofit group should keep enough money in reserve to cover one year's expenses, said Bennett Weiner, director of the Council of Better Business Bureau's Philanthropic Advisory Service, a charity watchdog group.

That's especially important for issue-specific political organizations, whose funding can ebb and flow depending on public interest in their cause, Weiner said.

Kuhn, who formerly served as the secretary/treasurer of Colorado for Family Values, acknowledged keeping afloat was a challenge for the group in light of its shift away from pushing for ballot measures.

"One of the problems — if you're a nonprofit like this — you have to continue being in the public eye to raise more money," he said. "One way to do that is to push initiatives."

Witmer, the operations manager, said the group was now on sound financial footing, in part because of the reorganization last fall.

At the time, the group was recovering from a failed petition drive aimed at clarifying a city anti-discrimination resolution and from the resignations of Perkins and then-executive director Paul Jessen.

Nancy Sutton, an activist from Massachusetts who briefly took over as acting executive director last year after Jessen left, described an organization in crisis.

"The board didn't really know what they wanted to do," said Sutton, who started her own group, Families First, in Denver. "I think they were just so overwhelmed with everything that happened. They were just kind of befuddled."

Witmer, though, emphasized Colorado for Family Values' recent legislative efforts. The group supported a bill signed into law by Gov. Bill Owens in May that made Colorado the 33rd state to ban same-sex marriages.

A failed attempt to pass hate-crimes legislation last session was opposed by Colorado for Family Values.

The group will continue working on such public policy issues, Witmer said.

Tom Pedigo, state director of the American Family Association, a conservative group that takes stands on issues such as gay rights and abortion, said Colorado for Family Values has taken a "quieter, more stealth" approach that's less confrontational — a reflection, he said, of Witmer's demeanor. He said the group is still a factor.

"They still have the same support base," he said.

Opponents of Colorado for Family Values see things differently.

Megan Day, director of Citizens Project, views Colorado for Family Values' recent defeats as a sign not only of an ineffective organization but of a community whose priorities have shifted. She said Colorado Springs does not want to revisit the negativity of Amendment 2.

"As long as (Colorado for Family Values) is in existence, they'll have a core group of supporters," Day said. "But in order to have any influence, they need a broader support base. And that just doesn't exist anymore."

Christy Pitts, director of the Pikes Peak Gay and Lesbian Community Center, also sees a changing Colorado Springs. She noted the city police department recently set up a recruiting booth at the annual gay pride festival, something she said wouldn't have happened when Colorado for Family Values was stronger and more vocal.

Former Colorado for Family Values chairman Will Perkins, though not involved in the group's leadership, said the budget cuts shouldn't be viewed as a weakness but as a strength because less money will be going to overhead. And he doesn't think the organization is in decline.

"There'll be a future (for Colorado for Family Values) as long as this issue is being forced upon her culture — of giving preferential treatment to homosexuals," Perkins said. "That will be the determining factor."

nians' foe er of storm

The Associated Press

Ariel Sharon, center, is surrounded by Israeli security personnel Thursday as he leaves the Temple Mount.

ANALYSIS

with the Palestinian Authority in an effort to achieve a final peace accord.

His critics inside Israel accused Sharon of callously exploiting the most sensitive site in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for political reasons. Sharon's visit came the day after former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was cleared by Israel's attorney general of any wrongdoing in a corruption investigation that had kept Netanyahu out of politics for the past year.

Netanyahu is expected to challenge Sharon for leadership of the Likud so that he can run against Barak in elections that may be held early next year. Polls of the Likud Central Committee, which must elect the next leader, show Netanyahu easily beating Sharon.

Sharon, his critics said, went to the Temple Mount to solidify support from the right as he girds to battle Netanyahu.

"The appropriate response to this visit would have been to ignore it," said an adviser to Barak, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

But Palestinians saw Sharon's visit as sheer provocation and were determined not to let it pass.

The compound he visited is known to Jews as the Temple Mount, the site where the two Jewish temples of antiquity stood. Muslims call it Haram as-Sharif, third holiest site in Islam, where the Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa mosque stand today. Sharon's visit symbolized to many Palestinians what they perceive as an Israeli threat to wrest control of the compound.

Riots broke out in the compound as Sharon's visit ended. They spread quickly.

Unrepentant, Sharon insisted Sunday in an interview with Ynet, the Internet site of the Hebrew daily Yediot Aharonot, that he bore no responsibility for the bloodshed.

"My visit did not ignite the riots," Sharon said. "This is a comprehensive and planned campaign by (Palestinian leader Yasser) Arafat in order to apply pressure on Israel and the United States."

Ariel Sharon

Born in British Mandatory Palestine, Ariel Sharon led one of Israel's elite units in its war of independence.

In the 1950s, he led secret raids into Jordan, attacking Palestinian fighters and refugee camps there. He flouted orders during the Sinai Campaign in 1956 to capture the strategic Mitla pass in the Sinai Peninsula, then recaptured the pass in the 1967 Middle East War.

In the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Sharon led Israel's counterattack across the Suez Canal into Egypt that helped turned the tide of the war in Israel's favor.

In 1977, Menachem Begin made Sharon his minister of agriculture in charge of settlements. Sharon spread settlements across the West Bank. In 1981, Begin appointed Sharon his minister of defense, and Sharon became the architect of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon. During that war, Christian allies of Israel massacred hundreds of Palestinians in two Beirut refugee camps, Sabra and Shatilla. An Israeli commission of inquiry found Sharon indirectly responsible, and he resigned his defense post.

But Sharon kept a Cabinet post and continued his campaign to ensure that the West Bank stayed in Israeli hands. The former general has always delighted in touring settlements and strategic points in the territories with reporters, maps in hand.

Over the years, he has also often invited reporters to visit the heavily guarded home he maintains in the Muslim quarter of the Old City.

Sharon served in Benjamin Netanyahu's government as minister of national infrastructure, using the post to again strengthen Jewish settlements.

Los Angeles Times

Mother: 'My son didn't die in vain'

By William Orme Jr.
The New York Times

JERUSALEM — Saturday would normally have been a school day for Mohammed Jamal Aldura, a boisterous blue-jeaned Gaza fifth-grader, but a general strike had shut [illegible] the Palestinian govern- also hit, taking four bullets in a volley that he later said had come from Israeli soldiers. A local ambulance driver, Bassam al-Bilbeisi, who was trying to come to the aid of the wounded father and son, was also killed by the gunfire. The entire [illegible] scene [illegible] and perhaps unknowing killer, and a prominent liberal Israeli legislator, Ophir Pines, called Sunday night for an official commission of inquiry into the death.

"My son didn't die in vain," said his mother, Amal, 34, [illegible]